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SUBJECT: FOR INDIA UN PANEL REPORT IS ONLY A START

REF: A. NEW DELHI 4391

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 6787

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 5201

Classified By: DCM Robert O. Blake, Jr. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The report of the High-Level Panel on UN Reform represents the beginning of a long-term process in which India has significant stakes, MEA Joint Secretary (UN Political) BS Prakash told PolCouns on December 3. Downplaying FM Natwar Singh's apparent rejection of a permanent Security Council seat without a veto during December 2 remarks before Parliament, Prakash took a more nuanced view, saying India would deliberate carefully over the range of issues addressed in the report before reaching any conclusions. While a permanent seat is broadly supported by all facets of the Indian political establishment, Opposition parties could use a veto-less Security Council seat as a means of attacking the UPA-government. The Congress-led government will also likely have to contend with public concerns about "second-class status" should a permanent seat without a veto become an option. Still, given the symbolic importance India attaches to a Security Council seat, New Delhi would probably in the end be content with permanent membership with or without veto authority. End Summary.

Panel Report Just the Beginning

[1](#)2. (C) The report of the High-Level Panel on UN Reform represents the beginning of a long-term process in which India has significant stakes, MEA Joint Secretary (UN Political) BS Prakash told PolCouns on December 3. Prakash downplayed FM Natwar Singh's December 2 comments before Parliament in which he said that a Security Council Seat without a veto "would not be acceptable to the country," emphasizing that the GOI plans to take a deliberative approach to the report and UN reform. Despite some initial press reports and political criticism of what is being described as the "second-class status" of veto-less permanent membership, Prakash noted that Security Council reform is only one aspect of the report, and noted that the panel's mandate included a review of the entire UN system.

[1](#)3. (C) Prakash said that India would probably release a statement on the overall work of the panel within the next few days, but did not feel obliged to respond collaboratively with the G-4 (Brazil, Germany, Indian, and Japan) on specific panel recommendations. The G-4 did release a very general coordinated statement on December 3 urging the international community "to embrace this opportunity wholeheartedly to bring about the needed change" in the UN, and reiterating the need for Security Council expansion. MEA Director (UN Political) Pankaj Sharma underlined to Poloff New Delhi's commitment to solidarity with the other candidate countries, saying that India would reject any outcome that excludes Brazil, Germany, or Japan from permanent membership.

"By Any Objective Measure, India Deserves a Seat"

[1](#)4. (C) Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, speaking before the release of the report, noted that "in terms of demography, contributions to peacekeeping or abilities at furtherance of the objectives of the UN, India more than fulfills the criterion" for permanent membership on the UN Security Council. MEA Director (UN Political) Pankaj Sharma echoed this view, stating that while the GOI views UN Security Council (UNSC) reform as one component of UN reform, and "not an end in itself," New Delhi clearly believes that the time has come for India to join the ranks of the Security Council as a permanent member. India has the will and capacity to contribute to the UN, he said, describing the current Security Council configuration as lacking the ability to respond to the realities of today's post Cold War world. The Council is "frozen in time," Sharma complained, emphasizing that the UN must evolve in order to retain its relevance and effectiveness.

What India Wants

[1](#)5. (C) Despite GOI insistence on Security Council reform, India has yet to elaborate on the details behind its vision for permanent membership in the Security Council, or on UN reform more generally. New Delhi has clearly stated its

support for greater representation of the developing world, and its opposition to rotational or semi-permanent seats, arguing instead for the addition of both permanent and non-permanent members. The MEA's Sharma claimed that the idea of a rotational seat for regional groupings like the EU "would not translate in South Asia," as neither SAARC nor ASEAN qualify as a "union." He argued that Security Council members should have a global focus, taking into consideration "the interests of the entire world," and observed that a regional seat does not "pass this test." Beyond this, however, the GOI position is vague.

#### Mixed Messages on the Veto -----

16. (C) Responding to questions in Parliament on December 2, FM Natwar Singh stated that a Security Council Seat without a veto "would not be acceptable to the country," but tempered his comments by observing that Security Council expansion was an "extremely complicated issue with wide ramifications." According to J/S Prakash, Natwar's comments came in response to questions unrelated to the predetermined topic (PM Manmohan Singh's September trip to the US) for which the Foreign Minister had been prepared. The Foreign Minister's comments were not the last word on India's view of the Panel report, he emphasized.

17. (C) Other MEA officials and GOI foreign policy advisors expressed surprise at Natwar's comments, and offered a more pragmatic approach to the veto. Ambassador KV Rajan, former Additional Secretary (East), described a general Indian consensus that there is "not a snowball's chance in hell" that India will gain a veto in addition to permanent membership. He commented that most GOI officials believe that permanent membership would be "fantastic, even without the veto." MEA Director (UN Political) Pankaj Sharma (protect) echoed this view, asserting (before Natwar's comments in Parliament) that India would not make veto power "a point in our case for membership," given the "ticklish" nature of the subject. He emphasized that New Delhi has no official position on whether veto authority should be extended beyond the P-5, but added, "When the time comes, India will be prepared to discuss this."

#### The Campaign -----

18. (C) Illustrating the importance the GOI places on UN reform, particularly Security Council membership, the Congress-led UPA government has undertaken a systematic and largely successful campaign to garner international support for a permanent seat. As part of this campaign, New Delhi spearheaded a coordinated effort among the G-4 contenders, and lobbied aggressively at the bilateral level. (refs A-C) With the notable exception of the US, India has requested support for its Security Council bid during nearly every high-level bilateral interaction, with countries ranging from Nigeria to Burma, Vietnam to China. The GOI has also sought support from regional organizations, such as the EU. The campaign has been largely successful, with dozens of countries expressing support for an Indian seat. During a joint press conference with PM Manmohan Singh during a December 3 visit to New Delhi, however, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that veto power should not be expanded beyond the P-5. "We believe it would be absolutely unacceptable to erode such tools of the UN," he said.

19. (C) To solidify its claims to the Security Council, the GOI has also begun to assert itself more visibly within the UN, particularly after suffering a humiliating defeat in the October 1996 election for a rotating UNSC membership. Viewing election to ECOSOC as a pre-cursor to Security Council membership, New Delhi lobbied hard for an ECOSOC seat. GOI officials, including Natwar Singh, have interpreted India's wide margin of victory there (174 votes -- "the highest number earned by any country") as recognition of New Delhi's ability to mobilize a majority of UN members.

#### Approaching the US -----

10. (C) According to Ambassador Rajan, the GOI remains unsure about the US position on Security Council reform, viewing Washington as uninterested in genuine reform. For this reason, India has so far been hesitant to push the issue of UNSC expansion in a US-India context. He said that some sectors of the GOI view US support for a Security Council seat as "a litmus test of the strategic partnership," though most recognize the complex issues surrounding Security Council reform. Former Indian Ambassador to the US Lalit Mansingh acknowledged that US support for India will be "the deciding factor," observing that without US support an Indian seat will not become reality.

11. (C) In discussions with Poloff, MEA's Sharma sought to downplay the sometimes marked differences between the US and India at the UN, particularly on human rights issues,

commenting that New Delhi and Washington agree on the need for an effective, credible, and efficient council. India does not work in contradiction with US values, he emphasized, adding that New Delhi had often served as a moderating voice among the NAM and G-77 countries on resolutions targeting Israel.

What About Pakistan?

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112. (C) Asked whether the GOI worried about Pakistani opposition to permanent Indian membership on the Security Council, Sharma stated bluntly that "India is not worried about opposition, by Pakistan or any other country," adding that each of the G-4 candidates have some opposition. He offered no strategy for overcoming opposition that could come from Pakistan, or from other Islamic countries, but said India was confident of receiving the two-thirds vote necessary to join the Security Council.

Comment

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113. (C) For India, permanent UN Security Council membership has come to symbolize India's arrival as a global power, and for this reason has become a high-profile issue for the government and foreign policy elite. Debate among the wider public is just beginning, and in this context Natwar's comments to Parliament further complicated the already vague Indian position on a desirable outcome for UNSC reform. However, it is probable that Natwar's remarks were made off-the-cuff and do not represent the official GOI stand. As one of our contacts put it, "By now we should all know that Natwar does not have the last word." The Indian Government is likely to be satisfied with a permanent Security Council seat sans veto, but whether the public and Opposition parties will accept this outcome remains another matter.  
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